ABSTRACT

The current study examines indicators in 13 public elementary schools throughout the state of Delaware by using a mixed methods exploratory research design, in an effort to understand the dynamic relationship between school climate and the social, behavioral, and intellectual outcomes of 5th grade students. Research indicators are consistently categorized and discussed in terms of the study’s 4 dependent variables: student safety, student risk behavior, general school characteristics, and academic performance; and the study’s 2 independent variables: dimensions of school climate and approaches to discipline.

Findings suggest that within the sample population, more favorable school climate schools had low student to teacher ratios, favorable school climates as perceived by students, favorable student perceptions of peer relationships, and more favorable rates of student perceptions of school rule fairness and school safety. Statistically significant, direct correlations were observed between student responses to the statement “I feel safe in my school” and perceptions of rule fairness, students’ liking of school, and student relationships. Further, unexpected positive correlations between gambling and student relations as well as between gambling and teacher/staff perceptions of school climate were observed. Positive, statistically significant correlations were observed between teacher education levels and students’ perceptions of school climate, students’ reports of liking school, students’ perceptions of school safety, students’ perceptions of student-
teacher-home relations, teachers’/school staffs’ perceptions of school climate, and homes’ perceptions of school climate.

The need to reveal the intricacies of establishing a constructive school climate and nurturing positive student outcomes remains. Once specifications of this interaction are better understood, policy initiatives can be enacted to better develop healthy environments in all schools. The greatest contributions of the study include a refined approach to understanding relationships between school climate and student outcomes, as well as to highlight the need for better approaches to collecting school climate data.